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THIRTY YEARS OF THE SOVIET FISH-PROCESSING INDUSTRY

V. M. Shperlinskiy

The fish-processing industry has developed a technical base of tremendous capacity since the beginning of the Stalin five-year plans. The most important achievement is the wide introduction of freezing. A. I. Mikoyan has said: "The significance of freezing in the food industry can only be compared with the significance of electrification in industry" (A. I. Mikoyan, The Food Industry of the Soviet Union).

At the beginning of World War II the fish industry had 64 refrigeration chambers and icing plants distributed over all the fishing regions of the Soviet Union. Regions such as the Far East, where formerly there had been no processing by ice, or processing only in limited quantities in the winter as took place along the Azov, Black, and Aral seas, now have the technical freezing capacities to operate on a year-round basis.

Besides the permanent freezing installations in the Far East, along the Ob' River, in the Volga-Caspian basin, and in the Murmansk area, a refrigerator fleet has been built. The fleet is for use both in production and in transportation of iced fish products. The fleet has particular significance in the Far East, where it is now possible to bring iced and delicatessen-type fish products from the most remote points in that vast basin to the interior of the country.

Aside from the capacity to manufacture natural ice (which in one of the southern basins is 2 million tons annually), the fish processing enterprises can now make artificial ice which is superior to natural ice from the sanitary, hygienic, and technical points of view. There are artificial ice plants in the Azov-Black Sea basin and in the southern Caspian basin.

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Refrigerators for fish storage in consumer areas, among which is the huge storage refrigerator near Moscow, have also been built.

Altogether 83.5 percent of the freezing chamber capacity, 81.8 percent of the storage capacity and 79.4 percent of the ice plant capacity available at the beginning of World War II had been built since the October Revolution, while those inherited from Tsarist times has been completely modernized. The production of frozen and refrigerated fish products had increased sharply as a result of the creation of this high-capacity refrigeration base. Comparison of present frozen and refrigerated fish production with prerevolutionary times is difficult since figures prior to 1913 are not available. However, if we take rail shipment figures for these products in 1913, which include imported products in transit, we find the production of frozen and refrigerated products in 1939 to be 154 percent over 1913 production.)

The production of fish fillets, the most perfect fish product, is inseparably bound up with the use of artificial cold. The Soviet fish industry has fully mastered the preparation of fillets of Murmansk cod and of southern bream, pike, perch, and sturgeon. This processing requires the best industrial facilities and technical know-how.

No less important successes have been attained in the fish canning industry. While the fish-freezing industry was nearly 90-percent Soviet built, the canning industry has been built entirely since the October Revolution. During the Stalin five-year plans, every fishing basin in the USSR has been supplied with high-capacity, well-equipped canneries. Among them is the gigantic cannery at the Astrakhan Fish Combine near A. I. Mikhov. There is no cannery in the world to equal it in capacity.

The tremendous economic significance of a far-flung network of canneries is obvious. Such distant regions as Kamchatka, Sakhalin, Primorsky Krai, Lower Amur Oblast, the Aral Sea, Lake Balkhash, the lower Ob' and European Arctic areas can now send to the consumer points hundreds of millions of cans of delicious fish of all varieties, while 30 years ago salted salmon and whitefish was almost all that could be had.

Fish canning in recent years has not only exceeded the prerevolutionary level 15 - 16 times, but has, in 30 years, exceeded the total Tsarist canning volume 150 percent.

More than 100 varieties of canned fish are produced in the USSR. The assortment is far richer and more varied than the American product. Ninety percent of all US canned fish is made up of salmon, sardines, tunny, and mackerel. The same percentage in the USSR is distributed among 11 species -- bream, salmon, herring, sardine, redfish, goby, sprat, cod, whiterfish, kilki (Baltic sprat), and flat-fish. While in 1934 fish canned in oil amounted to 5.6 percent of USSR processing, the proportion had risen to 12.3 percent in 1939. The output of fish preserved in small kegs and in oval or square tins has increased continually.

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The development of freezing, refrigeration and canning has of course cut down the proportion of salting in the Soviet fish output. What is produced, however, is of greatly improved quality. The primitive salting methods which predominated in Tsarist industry have been completely modernized. The production of lightly salted herring, sardines, and salmon has developed on a large scale. The Caspian roach, which was formerly turned out as a strong salted product, is now lightly salted for subsequent smoking. Kamsa salting has been much improved. The production of marinated herring has been widely developed. During the 8 years preceding World War II the production of marinades, including enterprises of the Main Administration of Fish Marketing, increased 10.5 times.

The fish by-products industry has been developed from scratch under Soviet rule. The difference between the Soviet by-products industry and that of capitalist countries (particularly the US) is that the USSR industry uses only the inedible waste from canning and fillet production for meal and oil, while capitalist countries rapaciously use valuable food material for the same purpose. The Soviet fish by-products industry is organized not only on shore but on the trawlers, where inedible fish from the trawl catch are processed for meal. In capitalist countries these fish are thrown overboard.

The production of fish oil in the 8 years preceding World War II increased 89 percent in the USSR; meal and fertilizer-processing rose 125 percent, of which meal amounted to 85 - 90 percent and fertilizer 10 - 15 percent.

The great significance of medicinal oils is obvious. In pre-revolutionary Russia, where the consumption of such oil was negligible, it was imported from Norway. Under Soviet rule the medicinal oil industry has been extensively developed and the domestic requirements are now entirely met by domestic production.

In the north, the Far East, on the Caspian and Black seas, oil-extraction plants which every year process hundreds of thousands of head of sea animals -- seal, sea-dogs, dolphins, white grampus and others have been built. The Soviet whaling fleet is pushing into the Antarctic, every year sending back more oil, meal, and canned whale meat.

Such fish products as smoked, marinated, cured, and cooked (kulinariya) fish were available only in large cities in prerevolutionary Russia, and in very small quantity even there. By the beginning of World War II the Soviet people had built 120 enterprises for the manufacture of such fish products. In the past few years the output of marinades has increased 4.5 times, smoked fish almost 11 times, cured fish 3.5 times, and cooked products nearly 3 times. More than one fifth of all fish products consumed have been subjected to further processing at consumption centers to improve their flavor and nutritive qualities. All basic consumption centers of the country have been included in the network of such processing enterprises. The Koluma Fish-Processing Combine near Moscow deserves special mention. Built in 1938-1939, this combine turns out a wide assortment of culinary and delicatessen products and is equipped with the very latest in fish-processing machinery. No country in the world has an enterprise to compare with it in scale or in level of technology.

Technical reconstruction and the maximum use of machinery has completely transformed the fish-processing industry's enterprises. At the same time, the fish-processing combine has emerged as a new type of enterprise, concentrating in one organization all the most important aspects of processing, and assuring complete utilization of materials.

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The Stakhanovite movement has shown that the capacities of many of the processing enterprises are higher than expected.

As a result of the fundamental reconstruction of the industry, the assortment of fish products has changed radically. While before the revolution only 15 percent of fish products were refrigerated, frozen, or canned, 50 percent are now so processed.

During the war the industry continued to supply the home and fighting fronts with fish products despite the damage to facilities and the necessity of relocating a number of fish-processing enterprises in the Far East.

During the first 2 years of the postwar Five-Year Plan, the Azov and Black Sea enterprises, which the Germans had completely destroyed, have been restored and are once more turning out thousands of containers of fish. The output of fresh, frozen, and smoked fish, in particular, is increasing. The processing enterprises of Murmansk are successfully handling the growing trawler catches in that area. More and more canned sprat and kila are being received from the Baltic maritime canneries. The fish-processing industry of South Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands is being restored successfully.

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